

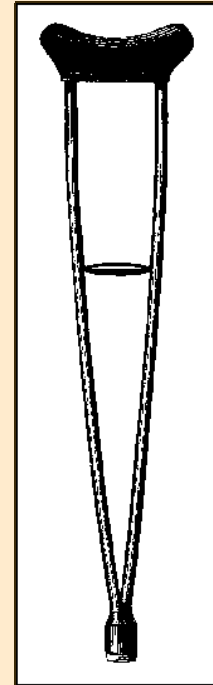
Kaiser Sunset

Phil Ehrens

After five days of a vague flu-like illness I suddenly had a rising fever and difficulty breathing at night. This was alarming enough to send me to the Kaiser Permanente Sunset "Urgent Care" desk.

There is a sign to the right of the door that said that the urgent care desk was open from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

I got there at 3:52 and so I stepped up to the counter with the trepidation of a longtime Kaiser member.



But maybe you're a fake doctor, and that's why you gave me fake medicine. Because you looked a lot like those doctors on TV. I bet the clinic just hires you and has you play doctor for the kids that just come in for silly reasons and aren't legitimately sick, because if placebo pills work, so would placebo doctors. That would explain why you told the guy in the bed next to me to try "aggressive oral irrigation, like gatorade." I knew that sounded totally made up.

--- Katie (*Inside Katie's Head*, a weblog)

A pleasantly diffident woman in her 50's with a bright orange perm greeted me with the words "Urgent Care is not available until 4 p.m." I asked her if I should go to the emergency room, and she chuckled, telling me that "The Emergency Room is for life threatening emergencies, is this a life threatening emergency?"

Uh, no. "What should I do?"

I told you, Urgent Care is available at 4 p.m. so you are in the right place ... it's 3:55 now, a doctor will see you in 5 minutes."

She noticed the book I had grabbed on the way out, a beginning guide to Kanji (Chinese characters in common use in Japan). "Oh, my father, back in Hawaii, he was a chemist, and had an IQ to be in MENSA ... he studied that kanji," she told me.

I went into the waiting room. It was just about 4 p.m. Within a very short time, three people had been admitted by a nurse. The fourth time the nurse came in, a woman jumped up and announced that the two people admitted last had come after her. The nurse said that this was nonsense, since she admitted people based on the timeclock entry on their admission form.

Looking at the people's faces around the room, I could see that this bit of data was not generally accepted as entirely factual.

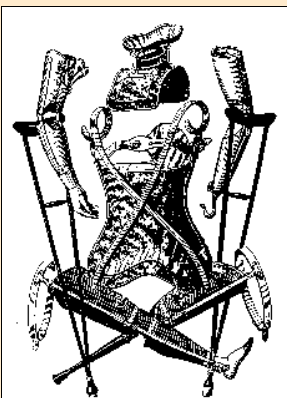
I was the next person admitted. I could see the looks

of pain on the faces of the three people who had been waiting before me. I was sitting right next to the admitting form drop-off basket and I noticed that the nurse grabbed the rear-most form in the basket without glancing at the time-stamp. The way the basket was designed, the rear-most form was guaranteed to be the most recently added one. The nurse would blindly grab as many forms as there were rooms available, always from the back of the basket. There was an additional component to the process that was less easy to determine.

*Immigrant goes to America,
Many hellos in America;
Nobody knows in America
Puerto Rico's in America!*

--- Stephen Sondheim

The doctor rapidly diagnosed me with bronchitis bordering on pneumonia, but not pneumonia, he assured me. He ordered an EKG and a blood panel. The EKG nurse was in-and-out in less than five minutes, and the doctor pronounced my EKG unexceptional.



I then headed down the red line to the phlebotomy lab, where the nurse behind the counter chirped animatedly "charming" as she handed me over to the nurse who would draw the blood. I was familiar with this

method used by waitresses to telegraph to their cohorts their coded impressions of the customers. According to our neighbor, Anne, who is a nurse, "charming" means "not charming."

Ever see a hot shot hit, kid? I saw the Gimp catch one in Philly. We rigged his room with a one-way whorehouse mirror and charged a sawski to watch it. He never got the needle out of his arm. They don't if the shot is right. That's the way they find them, dropper full of clotted blood hanging out of a blue arm. The look in his eyes when it hit --- Kid, it was tasty.

--- William S. Burroughs

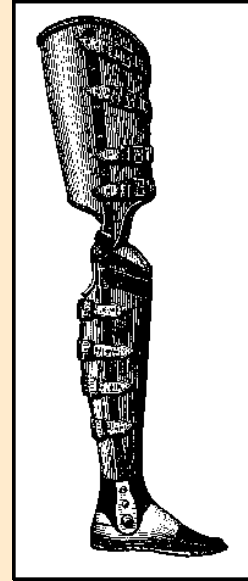
I passed out a few seconds after the blood-drawing began. This is called "going vagal," referring to a peculiar reaction of the vagus nerve caused by holding the breath while having blood drawn. When I woke I was shaking and drenched in sweat. It was cold and draughty and now I was soaking wet. I waited for about an hour, shaking with the cold, and aware of my rapidly rising fever. My blood was pronounced wholesome and the doctor gave me a prescription.

To come to terms with being a real vampire oneself is to face a lifetime's karmic challenge. Some people reading this article already know this. The rest are probably thinking, "Real Vampires, give

me a break! Sure, there are some pretty weird people out there, but all they need is a good therapist."

--- Inanna Arthen

I went to the pharmacy and was told my order would be ready in 15 minutes. 45 minutes later my name appeared on the annunciator. My order was ready. I queued up in the line of about 40 people, wondering if I would pass out before I got to the window. There was something going on up ahead. The old woman at the front declared loudly that the pharmacist who had taken her order had told her it would take twenty minutes to fill her order, and now she was at the front of the line, and by god she wanted her vag-itch ointment now.



She had, she said, to be at Caltech at 8 p.m. for a lecture. This, of course, got her sympathy from nobody. It turned out that the 15 or so people at the front of the line were all hopeless optimists, and this reduced the time in line to less than 30 minutes. None of which should be considered an excuse for the pharmacist insisting that the wait time was 15 minutes. (It was easy to determine based on the time-clock stamps on the pharmacy orders ... it was about an hour.) The additional delay caused by the lady yelling about her vag-itch cream was insignificant.

By the time I got home, I was feeling exalted, with a high fever, and fairly delirious. I wrote the first draft of this story and fell asleep.

A door opened down a long, cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard. "Hello, Mitty," he said. "We're having the devil's own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and close personal friend of Roosevelt. Obstreosis of the ductal tract. Tertiary. Wish you'd take a look at him." "Glad to," said Mitty.

--- James Thurber

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